

Systemic Review of Critical Incidents in Intact Family Services APPROACH

Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago will apply a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, systems approach to reviewing critical incidents in Intact Family Services grounded in Safety Science with a focus on ensuring the well-being of children in the program. The review process recognizes the inherent complexity of child welfare work, acknowledges that staff decisions alone are rarely direct causal factors in critical incidents, and provides a safe and supportive environment for child welfare professionals to process, share, and learn (Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, 2016; National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention, 2018).

Drawing from other industries which use similar reviews for low probability and high-impact events, the review will examine the contributions of people, processes, and systems in beginning to evaluate the program. The approach will integrate information from multiple data sources including record review, semi-structured interviews, and business process maps. Record reviews will include the last five years' annual reports produced by the DCFS Inspector General's office. Chapin Hall will also examine and benchmark Illinois against national standards for intact family services. These activities will be led by senior researchers with deep child welfare expertise and an applied knowledge of human factors—the science of human interaction with complex systems.

A standard framework is used to guide supportive inquiry at the case level that results in the identification and exploration of key decision points from multiple perspectives. At critical junctures, reviewers identify:

- Cues that may have prompted decisions or actions from the participant's perspective;
- Knowledge (training, previous learning, experience, etc.) used to inform these decisions or actions;
- Expectations about how a particular plan would develop; and
- Other influences or constraints (situational, operational, and organizational) that may have influenced perceptions of a situation and subsequent actions.

With the lowest foster care entry rate in the nation, Illinois has a high threshold for child removal. Safe implementation of this threshold depends upon the use of accurate and sensitive tools for detecting safety threats and risk, as well as the availability of preventive services to stabilize and support families as they work toward meeting the needs of their children. As the Department prepares to leverage Intact Family Services to provide additional prevention services using evidence-based approaches, we have an opportunity to: (1) examine the population served to understand the array of needs, risks, and strengths they present; (2) examine the array of practices and services currently being offered; and (3) review the infrastructure supports, including technological systems, that allow for timely and comprehensive documentation that can promote early detection of increased risk and prevent harm.

The review culminates in the development of key findings and an evaluation of the people-, process-, and systems-level factors influencing the findings. We will submit preliminary actionable recommendations in six weeks, including next steps to further evaluate the Intact Family Services program. Chapin Hall will work collaboratively with DCFS to refine and implement these recommendations with an aim to improve the safety of and service delivery to children and families.